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ABSTRACT

Danish "efterskoles" are "continuation schools" following elementary school--residential schools that allow students aged 14-16 to defer going to high school while they make choices about their educational future. Efterskoles are based on the principles of N.F.S. Grundtvig, who started folk high schools in about 1850 to educate Danish adults for participation in democracy, and on the principles of Christian Kold, who applied Grundtvig's ideas to children's education. Kold and Grundtvig believed that schools should give enlightenment for life rather than formal or vocational training; key elements of education should include equality in the teacher-student relationship, dialogue, freedom from examinations, freedom to shape one's own life, responsibility to the community, and equal value and dignity for all children. Until 1970 most students came from rural areas, but recent years have seen growing enrollment of children of salaried employees. All efterskoles are small (average 80 students). Efterskoles enjoy complete freedom of curriculum, and school goals are reflected in their physical structure. The government provides 50-85 percent of operating costs but does not interfere in curricula, providing general education requirements are met. Although no formal teacher credentials are required, most teachers have both teacher training and practical skills. The fastest growing educational program in Denmark, efterskoles provide an alternative to the regular public school process and an opportunity to experience a holistic approach to life and learning. Arthur Morgan School (North Carolina), funded in 1962, operates on similar principles. (SV)

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What Is an Efterskole?

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ABSTRACT

The folk education philosophy of Denmark was begun about 1850 by N.F.S. Grundtvig to educate adults in Denmark in order to participate in a new democratic form of government. Christen Kold extended this philosophy to the education of children. When Elizabeth Morgan founded the Arthur Morgan School in 1962, she based her philosophy on several educators, including Grundtvig and Kold. The Arthur Morgan School is a junior high boarding/day school for grades seven to nine in western North Carolina. Joyce Dinwiddie Johnson, staff member at Arthur Morgan School, went to Denmark from February to May, 1996, to do research about efterskoles at the Nornesalen Research Center. Efterskoles are boarding schools for middle-level education. The research included visits to seven schools to observe the programs and interview staff members and students. These schools are very similar to the Arthur Morgan School. The report by the Carnegie Foundation on Adolescent Development in 1989 advocated the creation of small communities for learning where stable, close, mutually respectful relationships with adults and peers are considered fundamental for intellectual development and personal growth. Such small school communities have existed in Denmark since 1851 and continue to be an important part of the Danish educational system today.

The Danish "efterskole" is unique. It is a Grundtvig/Kold inspired school for students, 14 to 16 years old. It is an "efterskole" or "continuation school" following elementary school, a residential school for the 9th or 10th level. Some are called "ungdomsskole" or youth schools. Students who go to an efterskole are deciding not to go on to the next level immediately (high school). They are also faced with a choice at this time, whether to leave school or to take examinations to continue at the secondary level.

Grundtvig (1783–1872), a clergyman, poet, historian, and philosopher, promoted folk high schools to educate adults, for "the folk" to be "enlightened for life" and to learn how to participate in a democracy. He felt everyone, not just the

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elite, should be educated to participate in life. The first school for young farm lads was started by teacher Christen Kold (1816–1870) in 1851 in Ryslinge on Fyn in Denmark. Kold wanted to reach young people when they reached puberty and not wait until they were adults. He wanted to apply Grundtvig's educational ideas for adults to the education of children. He put Grundtvig's ideas into practice.

Kold felt that children must be allowed time to develop the capacity for feeling before they are taught facts, to develop appreciation for life before they learn skills. Skills have in reality only a small value, because they are only the means or instruments for the service of the spirit, according to Kold. The conventional school of the time, with its rigidity and its emphasis on written instruction, memorization, cramming, and testing, deadened and desensitized the minds and hearts of its students, rather than arousing their curiosity to encourage true learning (*The Danish Folkehojskle Today*, 1992, p. 6). "The school should create a framework such that pupils will develop perception, imagination, and love of learning." This means the teacher-pupil relationship is one of equality. "Schools should prepare students to take part in decision-making and taking responsibility for rights and duties in a society that has freedom and democracy" (Andersen, 1994, p. 45).

For Grundtvig and Kold, schools should give enlightenment for life rather than formal or vocational training. Children and adults alike are respected as independent thinking beings and the aim is to help them develop into "complete human beings."

There should be an emphasis on human enlightenment through awakening by means of "the living word," thus creating in youth an attitude of receptivity toward life and bringing them into a concrete relationship with the practical phenomena of life. Dialogue was one of the most fundamental principles of Kold —

the principle of continuous interaction. Communication should not be one-way; we learn from each other.

The schools should be free from any kind of examinations. The teaching style should be based on "free, open poetic-historical talks." They should feature oral rather than written instruction and dialogue with teachers.

The schools should be residential in order for the students and teachers to have daily interaction at meals, in their homes, and at practical work. This would provide an opportunity for interaction with each other which is how we learn about life.

One of the fundamental principles is that one is free to shape one's own life, but one is responsible not only for oneself, but also for the community; with freedom comes responsibility. In these schools, the community is first and the individual second. All teachers, staff, and students are members of a shared community.

Danish educator Anna Skriver feels that equality in Denmark came to life in the classrooms. Equality in the meaning of equal dignity can most easily be seen in children. Equal dignity for children does not come from being equally skillful or clever but in being equally loved. This comes from God's love for everyone without qualification. No matter how different, people are created by God and they have equal value and dignity as human beings. One might disagree with someone but one must respect that person's right to his or her own opinion (Skriver, 1993, p. 3).

Keillor (1993) found this acceptance of opinions when he lived in Denmark. He said,

> You can talk about death, God, opera, politics, your kidneys, anything at all. You can say how boring Denmark is, how much you prefer Swedes, and the Dane will not take it personally. He or she will hear you out and politely tell you you're full of road ap-

> ples. However, the lunch over which this conversation takes place is almost always the same: herring on rye bread, fried fish and a slice of roast pork with a glass of beer and then a slice of blue cheese and coffee. This sense of order is what makes freedom possible. There are eleven political parties in Denmark because there is only one way to eat lunch. Danes can be offended by neglect, by silence, by tardiness, by selfishness but they are never personally offended by anything you say, as long as it's not about the Queen. You should not say bad things about her. There are, after all, some limits. If there weren't limits to freedom, how would we know how free we are?

This acceptance led to what is known as "the special Danish model" which results in minority-protection. This protects the rights of ethnic minorities, the right to establish free churches, and also free schools.

The first school, established in 1851, was for young farm boys, and later girls attended, at first only in the summer. A few more schools were founded in the 1870s. Some were connected to folk high schools for adults. Another pattern was to be connected to a friskole (alternative elementary school). Now most efterskoles are separate from other schools; all are residential.

By 1947 there were 68 efterskoles and in 1996 there were 230. The number of students has gone from about 1,000 in 1947 to almost 20,000 in 1996.

Until 1970, two-thirds of all students came from rural areas and most came from farms. The most profound change is the growth in the number of children of salaried employees — from 13% to 31% of the student body. The model or average size is 80 boys and girls. Some have only 20 to 25 students and a few have more than 150. All but one school for girls are coed. No two efterskoles are alike. Often you find that they are housed in buildings that used to be a public school, a social institution, or a farm. Since the efterskoles enjoy complete freedom of curriculum, the goal of each school is reflected in the physical structure and arrangement of the school. Schools stressing gymnastics and sports will offer

good facilities for this, and those stressing nonacademic activities will often look more like a farm.

Most schools have a general program that includes compulsory classes in academics and sports and offers many electives that may include music, arts, theater, woodworking, sailing, and others. Some schools, however, do specialize in arts, sports, theater, or other areas. The general principles governing the relationship between the state of Denmark and the schools are freedom of self-government and liberal support of schools and students.

All political parties in Denmark support the notion of coexistence and competition — between a well-functioning public school system and private, state-supported schools. The implications of this broad support is that the freedom of parents and students to choose private schools is not a prerogative reserved for the rich but is open to all.

An efterskole has to meet certain requirements. It must be a private, self-governing boarding school offering a general education to youth 14 to 18 years of age. The headmaster or director must be approved by the state, and the buildings and educational equipment must meet certain standards set by the state. The curriculum is determined by the staff members and the local board and must also be approved by the Minister of Education.

If the school receives approval, it will be eligible for state grants covering 50% to 85% of the operational costs connected with educational activities. Loans are also available for construction or repair. In general, students pay between 33% and 50% of the costs but students who need financial support are also eligible for support from the state or local municipal council.

The diversity of the schools testifies that the freedom of self-government is not a token of freedom, but real. The efterskole is a free school. It has freedom of curriculum and ideology. The state will approve any curriculum plan ensuring

that the students get a general education, but the state will not interfere when schools define their curricula along political, religious, or pedagogical lines. In principle, the government will approve a curriculum with the stated goal of preparing the students for the eventual overthrow of the government, one based on literal pietistic reading of the Bible, one where classroom teaching is substituted by work in different shops and in the fields, one with just one subject, or one where students and teachers together decide what topic to study. Thus, they may design a curriculum according to the ideas and wishes of the parents, the school board, and the teachers.

Most schools now do prepare the students to take the same final examination at the end of 9th or 10th level as the municipal schools, in order to go on to the next level. This is a change from original Grundtvig/Kold schools which did not include tests or examinations.

Since 1913, Denmark has had compulsory education — free of charge — rather than compulsory schooling, and a free choice of schools is assured by publicly financed schooling outside the public or municipal systems. There is also freedom in the employment of staff members at the efterskoles. The board hires a headmaster or director who is subsequently approved by the state. No formal credentials, such as teacher training or college background, are required. The director employs his/her teaching staff and again, no formal teacher training is required, although in practice 74% of all teachers have received this training. Characteristic of the teachers in an efterskole, however, is that an individual usually has a dual education (e.g., skilled carpenter and teacher). Grundtvig did not want teachers whose experiences were limited to scholarship. He wanted teachers who were learned in both intellectual and practical pursuits. An important principle in these schools is that to be a teacher is to be one who learns (Borish, 1996, p. 73).

Kold agreed with another Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, who said that first and foremost, to be a teacher, one must find where the student is, to understand what he or she understands, and begin there. All true help begins with humility (Borish, 1996, p. 73).

The director and the teachers have weekly meetings to make decisions together about the school program and the students. Some directors make a few decisions on their own but most involve the rest of the group. The students also have meetings, some in small groups and some with the whole school.

The efterskole today is the fastest growing educational program in Denmark. According to the Efterskole Sekretariat, it has been estimated that nearly one-fourth of all Danish young people will soon be taking their 9th or 10th levels at an efterskole.

This middle school program fills the gap between primary and secondary educational institutions. It gives youth a chance to grow and develop in a boarding school setting with a community that cares. The key to an under-standing of the popularity of this program is the attraction and impact, for the youth in Denmark today, of an educational and social environment in a residential school. Many are seeking a change from the elementary school where they have been with the same group of students for eight years. The other key to its popularity is that in 1993, a law was passed that the government would pay for students to attend efterskole. Now the middle-income group, as well as the rich and poor, can attend.

The decision to go to an efterskole means that together with one's parents, a student has chosen an alternative to the normal process. In the Danish public educational system, students have the option of completing the public elementary school in either the 9th or 10th grade (normally at the age of 15 or 16). If they wish to continue (and most do), they must decide whether they wish to

attend an academic high school, a vocational school, or a business school. They must take examinations, at this point, in order to enter one of these schools. This means that young students are forced to make important and often difficult choices about their future education. This can be stressful for young adolescents. The efterskole represents a way of temporarily leaving behind the home, the school, and the local neighborhood environment directly connected with the pressure of decisions about their future education plans, which in many cases young people do not feel they are ready to make.

Separation from parents is another aspect of a residential school. Adolescence is a borderline time for young people between the known and unknown, the home and the unfamiliar, a transition time from being children to becoming adults. Parents find they experience less friction with their adolescent children when they return home. There is the potential for a new start as all the students and teachers are new to each other.

The attraction of the efterskole is that it has the environment of a residential school based on fundamental principles and ideas that counteract and are opposite to present social tendencies to split life and personal relations. The students and teachers are together twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The teacher now shares all aspects of the students' lives — they are together in classes, at meals, playing games, and doing work, and they say goodnight when the day is over. At an efterskole, all teachers and students are members of a school community.

Borish (1996) writes,

> The most unique and at the same time the most central feature of the efterskole is its ability to recapture the wholeness of life. It is very hard to capture this in everyday postmodern life – it is too unbalanced, unconnected, speed-drive — a fragmented chaos. (p. 68)

"The efterskole is an educational island in modern society." This is how Ulla Madsen describes this experience. The students are part of a school community that is like being on an island. This experience can be used to strengthen the aims of society so that when both staff and students leave, they have learned the value of living in community and learning from each other and everyday life. We do not have to separate our lives into different spaces but should bring it all together and see the connections (Madsen, 1995, p. 350). Finn Rahbek, Director of Kolding Efterskole, says: "Efterskoles fill the need to make one's life whole instead of fragmenting human life into many 'lives': work life, family life, leisure time life and social life" (Borish, 1996, p. 69).

Lis Thomsen was an exchange teacher from Denmark at the Arthur Morgan School in 1993/94. She wrote about her observations of Arthur Morgan School and compared the school with efterskoles in Denmark.

> The idea of a living, learning community was exactly the way the Grundtvigian schools in Denmark started almost 150 years ago, and is still one of the main ideas behind the efterskoles today. But, what is a "living, learning community"? Both at AMS and in the efterskoles it means working, eating, having fun, being bored, being busy, working out crises, going on field trips, partying, doing chores . . . all together. A place where everybody learns from everybody every day. Another important part of the idea is to learn to be a part of a community. To learn that what I do matters to the community. I have freedom to choose to be the kind of person I want to, to act the way I want, but at the same time I have responsibility to take my share and be an engaged part of "my world."

Another important comparison is on the pedagogic level. Grundtvig's (and AMS's) main principle, as I see it, is to make everybody realize that knowledge is useful. When the students realize that they can use their skills in math and English, it becomes much more interesting to learn. This means that we do not need to test and give grades all the time; the goal is not to get an A, but to be

able to use what you have learned. Since the students are usually not on the same level, they will need some individual attention, which is achieved by having small classes . . . and smaller schools.

"Nobody can learn anything (useful) before they are complete human beings," said Kold about 150 years ago. That is exactly what I see happening at AMS! When the students have too many problems with peers, self-esteem, parents, and so on, they are not capable of learning very much, but when they feel comfortable and useful, they are suddenly capable of almost anything!

Listening is very hard. It is one thing to listen to the words, and another to listen to what the person really means. Even a person I don't like too much can have interesting and valuable opinions. At All School Meetings, the important skills of listening and finding solutions is practiced.

Everything I have mentioned so far is what I see happening both at Arthur Morgan School and at the efterskoles in Denmark (Thomsen, 1994). An example of involving the students in the decision-making process at the Arthur Morgan School was a discussion by the students and staff members about quiet time. Quiet time is for one half-hour following lunch and chores. The staff members were committed to it but not all the students were. At an all-school meeting, it was decided by the staff and students that they could read, knit, draw, play a solitaire card game, or nap as long as they were quiet and did not involve others. It was also decided that the students would rotate to a different group and place every six weeks. This led to much more cooperation and commitment to quiet time.

According to Else Hojlund of the Efterskolernes Sekretariat in Copenhagen, the efterskole is a culturally recognized ritual in Denmark that prepares a student in significant ways for the adult phases of the life cycle, even if it doesn't clearly mark the transition to adult status.

Eric Barne describes the attainment of autonomy as "the release or recovery of three capacities: awareness, spontaneity and intimacy."

- Awareness – the capacity to hear the birds sing.
- Spontaneity – option, the freedom to choose and express one's feelings.
- Intimacy – the spontaneous candidness of an aware person (to feel the radiance of a sunset) (Borish, 1996, p. 72).

If students are encouraged to look at the whole of life, then perhaps their capacities of awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy will be released.

Vilhelm Gronbech said, "Life is a wholeness and can only be healthy when it is experienced as a whole, from work to celebration, from the toil of daily bread to the needs of the spirit, from the crops of the field to the nourishment of the soul" (Borish, 1996, p. 69). Christen Kold said, "First make them glad, then make them enlightened."

The unique and at the same time most central feature of the efterskole is its ability to recapture the wholeness of life. According to Grundtvig, "The spirit (not knowledge) is power. Real life is the final test." Efterskoles are "schools for life."

This paper was written by the author in April 1996 in Ollurup, Denmark.

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